

# **Snakes Alive....**

## ***An introduction to snakes, snakebites***

*By Tech. Sgt. André Nicholson  
University Affairs*

Some people attended the presentation as part of their student curriculum, others came out of pure curiosity, but whatever the reason behind their attendance the spectators were certainly “rattled” by what they saw and heard.

Students, faculty, and staff members filled Lecture Room E at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USU)

Wednesday afternoon to see “Snakes Alive” a presentation given by Bruce Shwedick with Reptile Discovery Programs. The presentation features venomous snakes from North, South, and Central America, as well as Africa and Asia.

The “Snakes Alive” presentation, in particular, focuses on “medically important species,” such as the snakes responsible for most cases of snakebites: the Copperhead and the Western Diamondback Rattlesnake. Also presented were the African Gaboon Viper and the King Cobra, which rarely bite people but are the largest venomous snakes on earth according to Mr. Shwedick. Students learn about the regions of the world where snakebites are most prevalent, the effects of snake venom, and medical protocols.



*Photo by HMI Leandro Aguda*  
**Bruce Shwedick, with Reptile Discovery Programs, holds a Yellow Python that he brought to the university as part of his “Snakes Alive” presentation Wednesday afternoon as Dr. John Cross, professor Tropical Public Health, stands by.**

The presentation is given as part of the MS-1 (first year medical students) course in diagnostic parasitology/medical zoology for the Department of Preventive Medicine and Biometrics, which is directed by John Cross, Ph.D., professor, Tropical Public Health. The course also uses insects as part of the curriculum.

MS-1s are given approximately 40 hours of lecture/lab involving parasites and parasitic diseases found in people around the world. As a military physician, it's possible they might encounter these diseases.

"The course basically provides exposure to the different situations that physicians may come across in the field, so when it happens it won't be the first time they've seen it," Dr. Cross said.



**Mr. Shwedick, holds a female Anaconda during his presentation. The Anaconda rarely bites, but will defend itself by squeezing if it feels threatened. Anacondas can reach up to 17 feet and swallow a small human, although there are no documented cases of human deaths by an Anaconda according to Mr. Shwedick.**

*Photos by TSgt. Andre Nicholson*



**The Western Diamondback Rattlesnake is found in almost every state in the United States and is the most dangerous snake in North America.**